Merritt Parkway, Norwalk River Bridge
Spanning the Norwalk River at the 17.6 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Norwalk
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-92

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Norwalk River Bridge

HAER No. CT-92

Location:	Spanning the Norwalk River at the 17.6 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Norwalk, Fairfield County, Connecticut UTM: 18.631995.4555530 Quad: Norwalk North, Connecticut
Construction Date:	1937
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Mariani Construction Company New Haven, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the Norwalk River
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1640, Roger Ludlow acquired land along the east side of the Norwalk River from the Long Island Sound to twelve miles inland. A couple of months later Daniel Patrick, a friend of Ludlow, purchased a similar amount of acreage on the west side of the river. These two acquisitions encompassed all of present-day Norwalk.[1]

Ten years passed between these purchases and settlement of the region. In 1650, Ludlow sold his land to residents of the Hartford Colony. That same year, these new owners moved to what is now East Norwalk, under the leadership of two surveyors, Richard Olmstead and Richard Webb. In 1651, Norwalk formed a town. The community gradually expanded as an agricultural and shipping center. At one point Norwalk included parts of Wilton, New Canaan, and Westport. By the beginning of the American Revolution, Norwalk included the districts of Norwalk, South Norwalk, East Norwalk, West Norwalk, Broad River, Silvermine, Winnipauk, and Cranbury.[2]

In summer 1779 the British burned more than 300 structures in the town. The community took several years to rebound from this loss, but by the early 1800s, Norwalk was again an expanding agricultural and shipping community. Larger scale industrial development commenced in 1848, when the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad reached the Norwalk River. Norwalk became a hat-making center. The Volk Hat Company employed more than 500 workers. Other substantial enterprises developed, including the Norwalk Lock Company, Norwalk Iron Works, and Roth and

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[1]———, This Is Norwalk (Norwalk: League of Women Voters, 1963), 5.

[2]Samuel Richard Weed, Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years (South Norwalk: C. A. Freeman Publishers, 1901), 18-19.

Goldschmidt Corset Company. Fueling this development was the arrival of large numbers of Irish and German immigrants.[3]

Following World War I, Norwalk experienced another population boom, as many New Yorkers who had vacationed in Norwalk for years settled permanently and began to commute. These new arrivals eagerly awaited completion of the Merritt Parkway. After it was finished, the parkway helped to accelerate the residential development of the western sections of the community, especially Winnipauk and Cranbury. During World War II watchtowers were established on the Merritt to spot airplanes and relay the information to Mitchell Field on Long Island.[4]

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Originating in Redding, the Norwalk is a moderate sized river, after it merges with the Silvermine River it empties into the Long Island Sound. The Daniel Deering Construction Company of Norwalk, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from New Canaan Road/Route 123 to West Rocks Road, in Norwalk (ConnDot project #180-51). While the Norwalk River Bridge is within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Mariani Construction Company of New Haven, Connecticut (ConnDot project #180-64).[5] The bridge cost

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[3]This Is Norwalk, 5-6.

[4]Deborah Wing Ray and Gloria P. Stewart, Norwalk Being an Historical Account of That Connecticut Town, (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1979), 194, 200.
This Is Norwalk, 6.
"3000 Attend Merritt Parkway Opening; Hear Cross Voice Hope For Extension," Norwalk Hour, 30 June 1938, p. 1.

[5]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

$90,915 and was completed in 1937. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Comstock Hill Road, in Norwalk, to West Rocks Road. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, Connecticut (ConnDot project# 180-95). In 1988, all loose and spalling concrete was removed from the Norwalk River Bridge, it then was patched (ConnDot project #173-107).[6]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Norwalk River Bridge is a triple-span, reinforced-concrete round arch bridge. The center arch has a 16' radius, and the outer arches have 13'-6" radii. The springline is 9' above the footings which are on steel piles. Each arch has a constant thickness of 18", but a 30" wide smooth band defines the arch on the spandrel. The pier between each arch has a triangular-shaped pylon to divert water and debris around the pier.

The Merritt Parkway travels over the 158'-wide bridge almost 13' above the parapet wall. The parapet is topped with a 24" deep coping. On the north elevation the parapet steps 2' down between each arch from the east to the west. On the south elevation the parapet is level across the center arch and slopes down over the outer arches. The pylons, arch bands, and parapet copings are streaked green, and the spandrels are cream colored.

The reinforced-concrete wing walls vary greatly in length and orientation. The northeast

[6]Norwalk River Bridge, DOT #721; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

wing wall follows the Norwalk River for 284'. The other wing walls are around 40' long. All the wing walls have sloping tops and are supported on footings on steel piles.

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Weed, Samuel Richard. Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years. An Account of the Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Charter of the Town. South Norwalk: C. A. Freeman Publishers, 1901.

———. This Is Norwalk. Norwalk: League of Women Voters, 1963.

Norwalk Hour. 1937-38.

———. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

———. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.